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## GWADAR: THE ULTIMATE BETRAYAL OF BALOCHS



*Pakistan fencing Chinese projects in Gwadar/ Image Source:  
News intervention*

**Brigadier (Dr.) Rajeev Bhutani**

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*By*

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# GWADAR: THE ULTIMATE BETRAYAL OF BALOCHS

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## ABSTRACT

*Gwadar, a Pakistani seaport, came in to international prominence when Pakistan engaged China for its construction in 2002 and later when it became a crucial part of the multibillion dollars China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. In 2013, China got the operation rights of Gwadar port for 40 years. It's quite possible that, in the near future, Pakistan will be left with no choice but to hand over Gwadar port to China, in the same way as the Chinese have got hold of Hambantota from Sri Lanka. From the feverish Chinese developmental activities in Gwadar supported by Pakistan with its latest fencing plan, It has become obvious that the federal government is conspiring to displace the local Balochs from the city, change its demography and ultimately separate Gwadar from Balochistan – assisting China in their overall game plan of taking possession of Gwadar. Baloch people term it as “the beginning of a conspiracy to separate the coast from Baloch Homeland.”*

## Introduction

Gwadar in the Balochi language means ‘Gateway of Winds’. Gwadar is a port city, strategically located at the confluence of Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. It is a hammerhead peninsula on the western part of Makran in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. This peninsula has two almost perfect, but naturally curved, semicircular bays on either side, namely the Paddi Zirr (West Bay) and Deymi Zirr (East Bay).<sup>1</sup> It

is in close proximity to the vital Straits of Hormuz, through which an estimated 40 percent of the world's oil supply passes. It is the district headquarters of Gwadar district. The population of district Gwadar is 235000 and it covers an area of 15210 sq. km. Its coastline stretches for approximately 600 km. District Gwadar consists of four tehsils: Jiwani, Pasni, Ormara and Gwadar.<sup>2</sup>

When the state of Pakistan came in to existence in 1947, Gwadar was not a part of it but joined Pakistan later in September 1958. Gwadar port came in to international prominence, first when Pakistan engaged China for its construction in 2002 and later when it became a crucial part of the multibillion dollars China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Gwadar is often in news because of Chinese developmental activities, which deprive the local inhabitants of their legitimate share in the prosperity of the region and even their livelihood. Pakistan government is continuously endeavoring to house Chinese and Punjabis in the region in the coming few years so as to bring a demographic change and reduce the ethnic Baloch to a minority. The Pearl Continental hotel attack, which sits on the "Koh-e-Batil" hill overlooking the Gwadar port on 11 May 2019 by the Members of Balochistan freedom groups, was a sort of warning to the ruling dispensation.<sup>3</sup> Developments in Gwadar cannot be studied in isolation from Balochistan. Hence it is proposed to study the subject in the sequence as under:-

### **History of Gwadar:**

- Balochistan and Grave Injustice to Its Inhabitants;
- Ill-treatment and Sheer Neglect of Inhabitants of Gwadar;
- Arrival of China on the Scene;
- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Master Plan;
- What have Chinese Planned for Gwadar?

- Subsequent Developments in Gwadar;
- Gwadar Fencing: The Ultimate Betrayal of Balochs.

### **History of Gwadar**

According to the Early History of India, the Makran region is believed to have been conquered by Alexander the Great in 325 B.C during his retreat from India. Thereafter, the area was ruled by Seleucus Nicator, one of his generals, who in turn ceded it to the Mauryan Empire in 303 BC. In 711 A.D Muslim army under Muhammad bin Qasim captured the town of Gwadar. In the following centuries the area was contested between various Iranian and Indian powers. Portuguese explorers captured and ransacked Gwadar in the late 16th century. This was followed by centuries of local rule by various Baloch tribes. In 1783, Sultan Bin Ahmad of Muscat acquired the port of Gwadar from Nasir Khan I, the Khan of Kalat.<sup>4</sup>

After the first Afghan war this area came to the attention of British and the British Government facilitated Muscat to retain Gwadar. In 1947 after the independence of Pakistan, areas except Gwadar and its surroundings joined the Balochistan States Union, as part of Makran state. Pakistan requested the British for buying Gwadar from Muscat since the British had a tacit agreement with Sultan of Muscat. Pakistan succeeded in concluding an agreement with the British Government on August 1, 1958. According to the agreement the Pakistani Government had to pay an amount of £3 million (\$10m) along with some concessions to the Muscat Government. Hence on September 8, 1958 Gwadar was transferred to Pakistan, through the British representative. On behalf of the Sultan of Muscat, Wali handed over Gwadar to the representative of the British Counsel General in Muscat, who in turn, handed over possession to Pakistan. It was made a tehsil of district Makran in the Balochistan province and on July 1, 1977 it was given the status of a district.<sup>5</sup>



### **Balochistan and Grave Injustice to Its Inhabitants**

According to the 2017 census of Pakistan, there were approximately 207.8million people in Pakistan, with the Baloch accounting for 3.3 percent (6.86 million) of the population, living in Balochistan,<sup>6</sup> which is the largest province comprising 44 percent of the total land area<sup>7</sup> and contains most of the country's oil, gas and mineral wealth.

Pakistan's claim over Balochistan is highly questionable. The Baloch region proclaimed by the Baloch as 'Greater Balochistan' extends from the area in Pakistan to Iran and Afghanistan. Historical oral tradition supported by archeological evidence revealed that this is one of the oldest settlements in the world. Many centuries ago, most of Balochistan was under a Hindu king who hired local tribesmen to keep marauders from Multan and Frontier at bay. These tribesmen then toppled the king to establish a Kalat, which was presided over by a Khan. Later with the growth of British influence in India, by 1839 Balochistan also came under their control. With the turn of the century when the freedom struggle under the aegis of the Indian National Congress got intensified, Baloch tribe leaders too began to harbor dreams of forming an independent country – separate from India and Pakistan. Mir Ahmad Yar Khan, the Khan of the Kalat at that time, hired Muhammad Ali Jinnah to fight the case for Baloch Independence. Mr. Jinnah won the legal case for establishment of Balochistan as an independent country. Balochistan was to be declared independent on 5th August 1947 with the same territorial and administrative freedom that the Kalat enjoyed in 1838. In fact, by the time Pakistan and India gained independence, Baloch leaders had placed a formal ambassador in their commission in Karachi (the first capital of Pakistan) and hoisted the Baloch flag there, just like different countries do.<sup>8</sup>

But the Baloch people were betrayed by the same person, who won the protracted legal battle for them. Despite stiff resistance from the Baloch leaders, all regions and factions of Balochistan were coerced by Jinnah into signing accession treaties with the Islamic Republic.<sup>9</sup>

However; the betrayal did not end there. It has continued for decades, with the Baloch being exploited both financially and politically.

- **Gas Reserves.** Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) was founded in 1950. Its first project comprised of drilling near the town of Sui, Balochistan, leading to the discovery of the largest gas field of the country in 1951<sup>10</sup>. Gas production started in 1953. In 2006, Pakistan had a net worth of 28 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves, among which 19 trillion cubic feet is present in Balochistan. Balochistan is producing 36-45 percent of the total natural gas produced in the country but instead of getting a fair share of revenues of gas, Balochistan is given royalties and share equivalent to Punjab. While as compared to Balochistan, Punjab is producing only 4 percent of gas and utilizes about 45 percent of the total gas production of the state.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Article 158 of the constitution of Pakistan, ***“A province in which a wellhead of natural gas is situated, shall have precedence over other parts of Pakistan in meeting their requirements from that wellhead”*** *(The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973)*.<sup>12</sup>

Contrary to this principle, Balochistan remained deprived of taking advantage of its resources for more than three decades after its production. In 1953 the gas transmission was initiated, and its distribution did not cover the areas of Balochistan. It was supplied to Multan and Rawalpindi, while Balochistan could only get a meager share of its supply in 1986. It is also widely believed in Balochistan, that gas transmission in the province increased and improved, once establishment arrived there to fight the insurgents. Ultimately the purpose was to fulfill the needs of the armed forces. Pipelines were laid down in Dera Bughti to carry out an operation against the insurgents. Before that this area had always remained out of the transmission of the gas supply.<sup>13</sup>

- **Minerals.** Other than natural gas and oil, Balochistan possesses 36 percent of natural resources, including copper, aluminum and gold.
- **Saindak Gold Reserves.** These are located in Chaghi district of Balochistan and its project was given to Chinese engineering firms/corporations with 50 percent profit. The share of profit for the Central government was 48 percent and 2 percent for the Balochistan.<sup>14</sup> The Pakistan government and Chinese firms continued to extract copper and gold from Saindak until 1995. Later, in 2002, with the growing interest of China demanding the lion's share in the deposits of Saindak, a lease project of 10-years had been initiated. The share this time allocated to Balochistan was lower than the previous share i.e., at 1 percent; for the government of Pakistan 24 percent whereas it was increased to 75 percent for the China Metallurgical Company (MCC). This agreement was supposed to be concluded by 2012. However, the contract was renewed for five more years till 2017 by the government of Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>
- The Balochs had hoped that it would bring job opportunities and development in their region. China MCC announced that it had provided jobs to 1600 people and contributed mostly in building schools and hospitals. However, their hopes were tarnished when a significant amount of people were selected from China and other provinces of Pakistan for higher positions. The Chaghi district officials further confirmed that no money, gained from this project was utilized for the development of Balochistan. Further it has emerged that in the absence of proper monitoring and international laboratories for estimating the exact ratio of copper and gold reserves in the mines of Chaghi, Chinese have been given a free hand to ransack Saindak reserves as much as they can. Lack of share in revenues, denial from the bureaucracy to build and develop infrastructure in Balochistan

and the plundering of resources in a vast amount are clear indicators that Balochistan reserves have been sold out at a very cheap rate to Chinese corporations and, Balochistan has no significant shares in it.<sup>16</sup>

- **Reko Diq**. Other than Saindak reserves, Reko diq carries another tale of injustice for the people of Balochistan. Reko diq means a sandy peak in Balochi language, which is also the name of a volcano. Most of the area of Reko Diq is volcanic. Reko diq is located at Chaghi, a nuclear fame site, in Balochistan. It is located at the northwest side of Balochistan, abet with Iran and Afghanistan border. According to Dr. Samar Mumbarakmand (member of Science and Technology, Planning Commission of Pakistan), the Reko Diq discovery is as old as 1978. Its large gold and copper reserves make it world's 5th most massive gold mine.<sup>17</sup> According to a study by Tethyan Copper Company (TCC) geologists — published by the Society of Geologists in 2008 — the copper-gold deposit at Reko Diq “is world class and contains 18 million tons of copper and 32 million ounces of gold”. Current estimates, which are considered quite conservative, say Reko Diq's revenues should be \$240-\$260bn over a 40-year period.<sup>18</sup> The Reko Diq Mining project is spread over 3.3 million acre area for which Pakistan is planning to build a world-class copper-gold open pit mine with a lifespan of 56 years. But this project required high mining techniques, skilled staff and cutting-edge technology to process the ore. Due to lack of required cutting-edge technology, Pakistan had to depend on foreign companies to exploit these resources.<sup>19</sup>

The lucrative gold-copper reserves attracted international investors from Chile, Australia, China, Russia, and the United States. Learning from the scenario of Saindak reserves and Pakistan's Central government's willingness to sell the national resources for negligible returns to Chinese firms for the reasons best known to them, Balochistan government has

become wary of Chinese interest in Reko Diq (During the discussions for the sales of the M-9 and M-11 missiles to Pakistan, China asked for a 20-year lease to the mineral-rich areas of Chaghi in Balochistan. The deal was concluded, and around 84 missiles delivered to Pakistan in 1993)<sup>20</sup>. Further, the material produced from these mines is required to be sent abroad for processing. Till date, the excavated copper from Saindak reserves has not been utilized in Pakistan by the Chinese company and alike could happen in the Reko Diq case.<sup>21</sup>

Though, Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan but economically, it is one of the most impoverished areas. Less development and infrastructure, lack of schools and medical facilities have just added to the tale of woes of Balochi people. Another hurdle is the biased attitude of center in showing favoritism to Punjabis while appointing officers to senior positions for/in Balochistan. It obstructs development of good relations between Balochistan and the central government. Balochi people are mostly offered low skilled labor and odd jobs. The poor economic conditions of the inhabitants of this province, thus speak for their perpetual agony spread over more than seven decades. Only one Baloch has ever held a major post in the national government, and the government of Balochistan itself is often run by non-Baloch installed by the central government.<sup>22</sup>

There have been six major insurgencies since the founding of Pakistan in 1947 with the first starting the day after Partition. When the Nation of Balochistan was declared in 1947, the government of Pakistan opposed their independence and invaded Balochistan, subduing the tribes and incorporated them into West Pakistan in 1948. The next insurgency occurred in 1958 but the seeds of unrest were sown in 1955 with the establishment of One-Unit system, whereby all four provinces of West Pakistan were merged in to one administrative unit to offset the East Pakistan majority. The Baloch vocalized their concern regarding the scheme that they believed would curtail their autonomy. Subsequent unrest in Balochistan led to the imposition of first martial law in 1958.

Following the end of martial law, 1963 brought the next round of insurgency as the leading tribes of the Bugti, Marri and Mengal Baloch rose up against the government's military cantonments (numbering about 35) in Balochistan.<sup>23</sup> Then in 1971, East Pakistan, who also had grievance against the government, was able to successfully break away and form the nation of Bangladesh. Taking inspiration from that, the most cohesive and violent insurgency was launched in Balochistan, lasting from 1972 to 1977. This uprising, involving over 20,000 insurgents, began with the state's dissolution of Balochistan's first democratically elected provincial government. The Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government launched a full-scale military invasion of Balochistan with more than 80,000 troops, which eventually crushed the insurgency killing an estimated 9,000 militants and civilians.<sup>24</sup>

Baloch opposition to the center continued to remain potent but was expressed mainly through political means until 2002 when the next round of insurgency began. The trigger for the current insurgency was President Musharraf's 2001 announcement of the plan to develop a massive deep-water port at Gwadar and insistence on moving forward with the Gwadar project over the objections of the Baloch. The Balochs were already aggrieved by unfair distribution of revenue and resources and they considered Gwadar as another step in the center's plan to colonize Balochistan.<sup>25</sup>

In June 2003, the army was deployed to Dera Bugti and the head of the Bugti tribe, Nawab Akbar Bugti, was pressurized to surrender. However, in January 2005, the rape of a female doctor working at a hospital in Dera Bugti sparked off a full-blown insurgency. The accused was an army officer and while the Baloch demanded a due process, President Musharraf declared that the officer was innocent. By December 2005, insurgent activity including attacks on gas pipelines and rocket attack on Musharraf's entourage escalated and the Pakistan army subsequently launched a military operation in Balochistan. In August 2006, Nawab Akbar Bugti was killed in an army operation fuelling further

protests and unrest across Balochistan. Despite political, economic and military overtures by the Pakistani state to assuage the grievances of Baloch, the insurgency still continues today.<sup>26</sup>

### **III-treatment and Sheer Neglect of Inhabitants of Gwadar**

Before we deliberate upon the pitiable condition of Gwadar inhabitants, it is essential to know what was promised to these people when the government of Pakistan took possession of Gwadar from Muscat. Prime Minister Malik Feroze Khan Noon addressed the nation on Radio Pakistan on 7 September 1958 to break the news of Gwadar's accession to Pakistan; Excerpt from that radio address is as under:

“The Government of Pakistan has issued a communiqué stating that the administration of the Port of Gwadar and its hinterland, which had been in the possession of His Highness the Sultan of Muscat and Oman since 1784, was today taken over by Pakistan with full sovereign rights. The people of Gwadar have joined the people of Pakistan and the whole of Gwadar now forms part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. ... ***I welcome the residents of Gwadar into the Republic of Pakistan and I would like to assure them that they will enjoy equal rights and privileges along with all other Pakistan nationals irrespective of considerations of religion, caste or creed. They will have their full share in the glory and prosperity of the Republic to which they now belong.*** The residents of Gwadar, most of who are members of the brave Balochi community, have close racial and cultural links with the people of Pakistan and joining the Republic of Pakistan represents the natural culmination of their political aspirations.”<sup>27</sup>

For decades, the coastal town of Gwadar had been a victim of sheer neglect at the hands of the Government, and hardly any development work was seen there. In 1988 a Belgium firm was awarded a contract to build a small “fish harbor cum mini port” at Gwadar, which was completed

in December 1992. In February 1996, the Government released Rs. 2 billion for the construction of a deep-sea port in Gwadar. In Dec 1996, major companies submitted Expression of Interest (EOI) for construction of Phase I of the Gwadar project.<sup>28</sup>

### **Arrival of China on the Scene**

In March 2002 Sino-Pak Agreement was signed under which China Harbor Engineering Company was to build Phase I of the Port at a cost of US \$ 248 million. Out of the \$248 million, Pakistan's contribution was only \$50 million, whereas, the rest was paid by China. The Phase 1 was inaugurated in March 2007 and the Port has begun operations in 2008. Control of the port was transferred to the state-run Chinese firm China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) in 2013. Though the port at Gwadar is owned by the Pakistan government's Gwadar Port Authority (GPA) but China has got the operation rights of Gwadar port for 40 years.<sup>29</sup> The revenue sharing and control agreement for Gwadar port shows that, for the next 40 years, COPHC will get a 91 percent share of the revenue and the Gwadar Port Authority just the remaining 9 percent. Although this is a 40-year build-operate-transfer (BOT) agreement and technically different from a lease; Pakistan has still lost control of the port for the next four decades. It's quite possible that, in the near future, Pakistan will be left with no choice but to hand over Gwadar port to China, in the same way as the Chinese have got hold of Hambantota from Sri Lanka, even though the government of Pakistan rejects such fears.<sup>30</sup> Alternately, China may turn its investments in Gwadar Port into access for its warships.

### **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Master Plan**

CPEC is considered as a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visit to Islamabad on 20 April 2015, had announced investments worth \$46 billion for CPEC, which was later increased to \$62 billion. CPEC is a 3,000-kilometer



corridor from Kashgar in Western China to Gwadar in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. Its strategic objective is reportedly to establish an energy route from Gulf to Eastern and Central China through the ports of Gwadar, Pasni and Ormara; thereby overcoming China's "Malacca dilemma" and also to facilitate trade between China and the Central Asian and Middle Eastern nations.<sup>31</sup>

The image of CPEC is created as a massive industrial and transport undertaking, involving power plants and highways. However, Pakistani newspaper 'Dawn' acquired an exclusive access to the original documents laying out the CPEC long-term plan and made startling revelations in its article on 15 May 2017. The plan lays out in detail what Chinese intentions and priorities are in Pakistan for the next decade and a half. The plan envisages a deep and broad-based penetration of most sectors of Pakistan's economy as well as its society by Chinese enterprises and culture. Though the main thrust of the plan is on agriculture but it involves every sector – textile and garments, mining and minerals, mobiles and telecommunications, household appliances (where the Chinese presence is already there), cement, fertilizers and building materials. A key element in this is the creation of industrial parks, or special economic zones.

In Agriculture, Chinese enterprises will operate their own farms, processing facilities for fruits and vegetables and grain, operate a large storage and transportation system for agrarian produce – controlling both the ends of supply chains, thus taking advantage of myriad dysfunctions that afflict Pakistan's agriculture sector. Main aim of the Plan is to help the poverty stricken Kashgar Prefecture, a territory within the larger Xinjiang Autonomous Zone at the expense of Pakistan and that too from Gwadar. Ten key areas for engagement are identified along with seventeen specific projects such as processing plants for milk, meat, cotton, grains, vegetables and fruits juice and fertilizer plants. Chinese have planned to acquire thousands of acres of land in Punjab in the name of demonstration projects for high yield seeds and irrigation.<sup>32</sup>

**What have Chinese Planned for Gwadar?** The Chinese have planned for a vegetable processing plant with annual output of 20,000 tons, fruit juice and jam plant of 10,000 tons and grain processing of 1 million tons. A cotton processing plant is also planned initially, with output of 100,000 tons per year; Storage bases in Phase One and Phase Two are also in the pipeline. Considering Gwadar as a CPEC entreport, the plan recommends that it be built into “a base of heavy and chemical industries, such as iron and steel/petrochemical”. According to the report, “some Chinese enterprises have started investment and construction in Gwadar” taking advantage of its “superior geographical position and cheap shipping costs to import crude oil from the Middle East”.<sup>33</sup> ***And who will benefit from these projects – not the local inhabitants of Gwadar but the surplus labor forces from Kashgar.*** There is a detailed plan for development of a “***coastal tourism***” industry that will include yacht wharfs, cruise homeports, nightlife, city parks, public squares, theaters, golf courses and spas, hot spring hotels and water sports, all along the belt running from Keti Bunder to Jiwani, the last habitation before the Iranian border. Gwadar is featuring international cruise clubs that “will provide marine tourists private rooms so that they should feel as though they were ‘living in the ocean’”. The plan has laid down an expansive vision and at the end it proposes “Make the visa-free tourism possible with China to provide more convenient policy support for Chinese tourists to Pakistan.” What is there for Baloch inhabitants or even Pakistani nationals - no mention of a reciprocal arrangement for Pakistani nationals visiting China.<sup>34</sup>

Any business enterprise before investing in a foreign country will like to assess the health of financial sector in that country. The authors of the Plan have identified various factors affecting Pakistani politics, viz., competing parties, religion, tribes, terrorists, and Western intervention. A high inflation rate, which was averaged at 11.6 per cent over the past 6 years, meant a rise of project-related costs and a decline in profits. Relying on the assessments of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB),

China Development Bank concluded that Pakistan's economy could not absorb Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) much above \$2 billion per year without giving rise to stresses in its economy hence it recommended that China's maximum annual direct investment in Pakistan should be around US\$1 billion. Likewise, it concluded that Pakistan's ceiling for preferential loans should be \$1 billion, and for non-preferential loans not more than \$1.5 billion per year.<sup>35</sup> It advised its own enterprises to take precautions to protect their own investments. That is the reason that Pakistan could secure only \$1- billion loan from China to repay the 'brotherly country' of Saudi Arabia.<sup>36</sup>

When it comes to national interest, Chinese are absolutely clear in their minds - the cooperation with Pakistan in the monetary and financial areas has been aimed to serve China's long-term strategy. The entry of Chinese firms will not be limited to the CPEC framework alone, as the recent acquisitions in the Pakistan Stock Exchange demonstrate. In fact, CPEC is only the opening of the door. What comes through once that door has been opened is difficult to forecast. Reportedly, the Pakistanis were pushing the Chinese to begin work on the Gwadar International Airport, whereas the Chinese are going ahead for early completion of the Eastbay Expressway - the work on the crucial project is gathering pace and is scheduled for completion by April 2021. The East-bay Expressway will be providing primary connectivity of the Port and its Free Zone with the network of National Highways to ensure fast transportation of import, export and transit goods.<sup>37</sup> The satellite images of the new international airport area do not show much progress either. The only activity observed over the last six months is the new barracks built for the Chinese airport construction staff.<sup>38</sup>

### **Subsequent Developments in Gwadar**

There were too many issues in case of Gwadar port that signal towards the government injustices to keep Balochistan underdeveloped:

- It is reported by the Gwadar officials that thousands of

acres of Gwadar land have been distributed among civil, military bureaucracy without paying sufficient amount to the landowners.<sup>39</sup>

- Pakistan has also established settlements of non-Baloch people in areas close to the port and other regions where development is taking place. This is a major grudge for the local populace who are not getting a fair share of jobs arising from economic progress, as mostly, engineers and technicians are hired from other states.<sup>40</sup>
- Another vexing issue is that the voices of fishermen in Gwadar – who make up 80 percent of the district's 235,000 inhabitants – have been largely ignored. They had been depending on for decades on Gwadar port for their livelihood but have now been abandoned due to these developments. As reported by local fishermen and other stakeholders, the project was not allowing fishing to continue and the Gwadar's jetty was often closed for security reasons. The jetty is the heart of fish trading, and their worry is about how would they survive with the closure of jetty. The closure of the jetty is only one problem. The East-bay Expressway, a road that will connect to the port, is being built on the east bank of Gwadar. It is rumored the construction will uproot locals. Further, not only would the fishermen suffer from the closure of the jetty and the development of the Expressway, but there is a chain of others who would also suffer – boat makers, oil factories, middle men, and buyers.<sup>41</sup>
- Other than fisheries, boating is also a source of livelihood to them. Taking away vast areas of Gwadar, thus takes away these sources of earnings from them as well.
- The forecast influx of 1 to 2.5 million non-Baloch workers to run Gwadar once the port is fully operational will make the Baloch a minority in their own province. This lends to the fear

that the Baloch will lose the small amount of semi autonomy allowed for the past few decades. Gwadar further ties Baloch grievances together because it would serve, along with its many other functions, as an export site for Balochistan's natural gas, from which the Baloch have no reason to believe they would meaningfully profit.<sup>42</sup>

### **Gwadar Fencing: The Ultimate Betrayal of Balochs**

The much talked about plan for fencing of Gwadar sea port that appeared in news on 28 December 2020 was reversed by Balochistan authorities on 2 January 2021. There is nothing new about it as the plan for fencing had been contemplated in 2015 and it was covered by English daily Dawn that had talked about a fencing plan to protect Gwadar from attacks of Baloch nationalists whereby local residents would get residence cards while all outsiders coming into the city would be registered at entry points. Again in April 2016 it was reported in the Wall Street Journal that the Chinese were pushing for a 65-mile fence around the whole town for purposes of security, with a special permit required by anyone—including locals—to enter.<sup>43</sup>

That fencing plan was now being put in to action. According to Asia Times, under the garb of Gwadar Smart Port City Master Plan the Pakistan army, in collaboration with the Makran Administration, Gwadar Development Authority, Gwadar Port Authority and the Balochistan government, would fence off the entire 24-square-kilometer area surrounding the Gwadar seaport to secure what they call the “crown-jewel” of the CPEC project. Work on erecting barbed wire fencing around Gwadar's sensitive parts has already started. Authorities plan to have 15,000 acres of land secured with iron barriers in the first phase of the project. Only three entry and exit points have been catered for monitoring the inflow and outflow of traffic. More than 500 high-definition surveillance cameras would be installed to keep a close watch on “suspicious activities” or unauthorized or forceful intrusions into the city. China could introduce a

“permit system” to monitor or regulate entry and exit from the walled city for security purposes.<sup>44</sup>

Fencing in Gwadar should not be viewed in isolation but should be gauged through the web of narratives being woven by the Pakistan’s Federal government for playing in to the overall Chinese game plan. Balochistan province has officially been divided into six divisions – Quetta, Kalat, Nasirabad, Makran, Sibi, and Zhob. These six divisions are further subdivided into 34 districts.<sup>45</sup> Of late, a new term ‘South Balochistan’ has been introduced by the Federal government to refer to the Makran coast. While visiting Turbat city in Balochistan on 13 November 2020, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced a mega development package for the provision of basic facilities like electricity, gas, water and Internet in its nine southern districts. Besides other things, he said, some 500,000 people in Southern Balochistan would be provided with the facility of 4G Internet connectivity under the package. It would particularly benefit the youth in the era of Information Technology, he added.<sup>46</sup> An average resident of Balochistan lives on less than a dollar a day, over 90 percent of the settlements in Balochistan have no access to clean potable drinking water or medical facilities and rural illiteracy exceeds 90 percent. Within Pakistan Balochistan’s per capita income is less than half of the country’s average meaning that on an average a Baloch is likely to be twice as poor as his counterpart living in any of the other three provinces. Even within the province of Balochistan; an average Baloch is twice as poor as an average Punjabi, Pashtun, or Hazara resident of the province. Even in the capital city of Balochistan, Quetta, less than one third of the households of the provincial metropolis are actually connected with the government water supply system and receive between 1-2 hours of water supply in 24 hours. The education system in the province is so inferior that those who can afford it would prefer to send their children to educational institutions outside the province; Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore or Peshawar. The same is true of medical facilities in the province; with a little affordability most people prefer to take their sick loved ones to Karachi or elsewhere for medical treatment.<sup>47</sup>

What is the criteria of selecting nine southern districts out of total 34 districts of Balochistan and rather than giving them basic amenities, announcing something, which has no value for them is like distributing spectacles to blind persons. Giving financial shape to Imran Khan's mega development package, on 19 November 2020, Pakistan's Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar announced that the government would spend Rs 600 billion on development projects in nine districts of Southern Balochistan during next three years to improve living standard of the local people.<sup>48</sup> At a time when Pakistan's economy is in doldrums and to repay debt from one country, it has to take loan from others and does not have money to even run the country, announcement of a development package is only a ploy to deceive their own countrymen. Subsequently, fencing of Gwadar has exposed Pakistan's government intentions.

It has become obvious that the federal government is conspiring to displace the local Balochs from the city, change its demography and ultimately separate Gwadar from Balochistan – assisting China in their overall game plan of taking possession of Gwadar. Figures speak for themselves - Gwadar Development Authority has granted development rights for 12,533 acres of housing schemes alone. Once built and populated, the housing schemes will likely change the demographic makeup of Gwadar, whose current population is about 235,000. Even at a low density of 50 persons per acre, once built the 12,533 acres of new housing development will attract roughly 626,650 new inhabitants to Gwadar, thus fundamentally changing its ethnic complexion.<sup>49</sup> It is obvious that development rights have been granted to house a population that would be three times the size of current population of Gwadar.

The Baloch people have sensed the plot correctly and therefore they are up in arms against the federal government. Khalil Baloch, Chairman of the Baloch National Movement (BNM) termed Gwadar Port's fencing as Pakistan's "vicious" attempt and stated, "It is the beginning of a conspiracy to separate the coast from Baloch Homeland." He explained

that entire Balochistan, including Gwadar, has been turned in to a military barrack. Khalil Baloch is very forthright in exposing the implicit designs of Pakistan's federal government, "Equally complicit in this exploitative process is the imperialist state of China. This fencing process is inhuman. History shows that no ruling nation has ever developed the oppressed but ambushed them in the name of development and looted its shores and resources."<sup>50</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, the Baloch insurgency, like any other insurgency, is very complex and multifaceted. A detailed analysis of the ongoing conflict has revealed that besides the classic greed- and grievance-based explanations, poor governance resulting from the ongoing plunder of Balochistan's natural resources, continued military domination of the province, and its economic marginalization and political isolation has been a major cause of mounting tension between the Baloch people and the government of Pakistan. The federal government, on the other hand, argues that the conflict is perpetuated by Baloch tribal sardars, who have discarded the government's initiatives to develop and integrate Balochistan with a view to maintain their own hold on power.

Major Gregory Pipes of the United States Army carried out a detailed study of the Baloch problem, which has been cited in the Pakistani Daily Newspaper Dawn (11 January 2012). He has presented empirical evidence in his study to illustrate that state actions indeed have a direct impact on insurgency in Balochistan and it states, "any reconciliatory move by the state results in a decline in insurgent attacks, whereas any state-backed hostility against Balochs correlates with a spike in insurgency."<sup>51</sup> Therefore, Pakistan's stance of apportioning blame on India for fuelling the Baloch insurgency is a mere propaganda to divert international and their own public attention from the real issues.

Balochistan province has the highest poverty level along with lowest life expectancy, education, health, water, power and sanitation



facilities. The paradox of resource wealth and economic deprivation is evident in the district of Dera Bugti, the location of Pakistan's largest gas field, which was ranked last out of 91 districts in the Human Development Index.<sup>52</sup> This further confirms that leaving aside the poorest districts located in the North, Imran Khan's government plan to select coastal South with Gwadar as the epicenter for developmental package is primarily to assist the Chinese in their mischievous designs. All activities taking place or subsequently planned for in Gwadar are in conformity with the CPEC Master Plan.

If Pakistan remains too much dependent upon China economically and militarily, the day will not be far when it may have to cede Gwadar to China, the way China handed over Hong Kong to Britain in 1842. Gwadar will become Special Economic Zone (SEZ) of China with inbuilt naval base. China and Pakistan considering themselves as "Iron and Blood Brothers" is a political farce being played on their people. In reality India and Pakistan are estranged "Blood brothers" separated by politics. Earlier it is realized by Pakistan, better it is; then both India and Pakistan can work together for the common prosperity of their people.

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